Minutes

SA Power Networks' Vulnerable Customer Advisory Group

Meeting Details

Organiser	Alex Lewis
Date	Wednesday 19 March, 2024
Time	9.30-12.15pm
Location	The Marion Hotel, Marion Rd, Marleston

Members

Georgina Morris	Chair
Alex Fry, SAFCA	Deputy Chair
Andrew Stock	Community representative
Jen Harris	National Council for Women
Silvio Iadarola	Multicultural SA
Jen Bradley	Community representative
Kym Mercer	Community representative
Amber Brock-Fabel	Youth representative
Lynette Day	DEM
Antony Clarke	EWOSA

SA Power Networks
Sophie McRae, Head of Customer Operations
Alex Lewis, Reset Engagement Manager
Cecilia Schutz, Advocacy & Policy Manager
Rebecca Carter, Energy Charter Program Manager

Guests/ Presenters
Matthew McCallum, Salvation Army
Jason Lindley, Essential Energy

1. Welcome and Introductions

Welcome and Acknowledgement of Country
Georgie welcomed all members to the meeting and acknowledged the traditional owners.

Apologies from Lynette Day were noted. Antony Clarke, EWOSA, was welcomed to the meeting.

CAF update and customer outcomes
Alex Fry provided a summary of the key items coming out of the last CAF meeting held in February and summarised the Briefing Note that was provided to all Advisory Groups.

- An Innovation Advisory Group is being established to provide customer input into the innovation framework and activities. EOIs are currently being sought with the intent of a member from each Advisory Group sitting on the new group.
- SA Business Chamber update on survey results. Alex to share findings.
- Bushfire preparations undertaken by SA Power Networks and process for undertaking disconnections and customer notifications.
- Presentation on new strategic vision and values for the business.

Alex provided an overview of the desire for each advisory group to have several customer outcomes. The consumption data was supported from a data perspective, being mindful that might need to look at lower socio-economic areas and Census data to help understand trends.

An offline meeting will be scheduled with AC/GM/AS/AF to discuss and provide further discussion at the next meeting.

2. ENA Safety consequences of loss of supply project

Jason Lindley from Essential Energy presented on the ENA findings of a report into the safety consequences of loss of supply. The aim being to improve networks understanding of vulnerability to loss of supply safety risk. The work has developed an Australian vulnerability map, and this can be applied to tactical and strategic planning and measures eg. network investment, priority restoration.

Discussion included:

- What are the next steps for Qld and NSW given the heatmap data?
- What are the cost implications? Will this increase expenditure in resets for networks investment? Noting that many of the vulnerable areas are sparsely populated.
- Has this information been shared with DEM given most of the vulnerable areas in SA are off grid?
- Model and adaptive capacity – does it look at battery resources, including community batteries?
- Battery/ solar combinations and options should be considered as part of this work. This would allow basic service provision in vulnerable areas.
- The importance of telecommunications during long duration outages was noted.

Action: Alex to share the slides with the group.

3. Affordable SA

Matt McCallum from Salvation Army provided an overview of the Affordable SA website, which aims to connect South Australians to essential services such as food, emergency relief and mental health services.

The data collected on usage is provided to the Dept. of Health. Food assistance is the category most selected by users. While there are a few constraints with the current site and platform, improvements to access are always being undertaken and explored.

It as suggested that the stories, shared in the presentation, would be a good addition to the website.

Alex to add the QR code to the SAPN website.

4. Energy Charter updates

Disclosure Report

- Disclosure Report 2024 has been endorsed by the Sustainability Committee and SAPN Board
- Future opportunity to provide detailed feedback on the report - *to be scheduled*
- 2025 Accountability Process evolution – changing to allow for more flexibility based on End User Customer Group (EUCG) feedback.
- Does anyone have interest in being part of the EUCG?
- Looking at the metrics as similar to what proposed for the Sustainability Report so currently some duplication.

Better Together Initiatives

- **Resilience**
  - Campaign Overview: Don't be in the dark. Know what to do
  - Soft launch Feb, official launch April 2025
  - Australian Primary Health Networks will integrate power outage planning into their national disaster and recovery initiatives
- **Life Support Customers**
  - Campaign Overview: Check. Plan. Do. Power Outage Plan
  - Soft launch Dec 2024, full multilingual launch April 2025
  - AEMC rule change – consultation opens July 2025.

– SAPN will run a briefing session once the paper is out for consultation.

5. Policy and Advocacy Update

Bec and Cecila provided an update on work in the policy and advocacy space.

Retailer Energy Productivity Scheme (REPS) 2026-2030 review – submissions due 31 March

Key topics proposed for submission:

1. Accessibility & Awareness/Promotion – REPS2 needs more effective promotion to increase program awareness and participation in the community.
2. Target Audience – promote more equitable access to program, ensure the vulnerable community have the best opportunity to obtain program benefits (e.g. tiered benefit system to ensure *Priority Group Households, priority sub-targets).*
3. Current barriers for renters to access.
4. Can SA link REPS more strategically to the role energy efficiency can play in future demand planning, including the Firm Energy Reliability Mechanism Scheme.

Discussion included:

- Need for discount to be applied upfront vs seeking a rebate for appliances.
- Needs to be viewed from a cost of living lens rather than an energy efficiency lens.
- Large commercial and industrial customers shouldn't be benefitting from scheme, particularly at the expense of priority target groups.
- While high income earners should be able to access due to the other benefits associated, need greater % to go to vulnerable customers.
- Conflict of interest with activity providers and current wait times.
- Scheme should be provided to access VPPS and batteries.
- SACOSS, SAFCA and EWOSA both lodging submissions.
- ESCoSA review due 12 April on their productivity review and promotion of REPS.
- Role of REPS in future demand planning that energy efficiency can deliver needs to be considered.

AEMC rule changes

SAPN has submitted two submissions to AEMC rule changes - Improving the ability to switch to a better offer and improving the application of concessions to bills.

ECA cross-subsidies in the energy sector

ECA seeking high level feedback on unfair cost allocation to inform a project. VCAG members were interested in providing feedback.

Alex to schedule an online meeting for those available to attend. Feedback due by end of March.

Export tariff comms update

A TAG working group was established in December to develop some comms, with the consensus being to keep information simple, with more detail in FAQs. The content has been approved by WG and senior leaders

There is currently not considerable media interest at present, we will consider promoting the revised content on socials etc, if we see a rise in customer/media interest.

Question re switching of high-powered systems eg. air-cons as a demand response. Cecilia explained this was misreporting in the media and there was no intention of this. There was a query whether SAPN should be more proactive given previous negative commentary. In addition, proactive media enables SAPN to get in-front of bad news and solar tax messaging.

A pdf version of the draft content to be shared for information to the VCAG.

6. Upper North Review

Alex provided an overview of a proposed consumer-led project, seeking funding through ECA's Participation Grants, to undertake a review of the Oct 2024 power outage in the Upper North to look at positive improvements going forward and how community resilience can be improved given the frequency of such events is increasing. The project is being led by First Nations Clean Energy Council, Flinders Ranges Council and Outback Communities Authority.

Jen Bradley would be interested in attending the stakeholder workshop / community forum.

7. ECA Consumer Survey Report and responsiveness to price signals

Georgie provided a brief overview of the ECA Consumer Survey Report (Jan 2025) on consumers' knowledge of electricity pricing and responsiveness to price signals.
https://energyconsumersaustralia.com.au/publications/consumer-energy-report-card-consumer-knowledge-electricity-pricing-responsiveness-price-signals

Action: Alex to email the report to the group.

8. AERs Toolkit for Energy Businesses

The AER has developed a Customer Engagement Toolkit for energy businesses outlining Better Practices for identifying and supporting consumers experiencing vulnerability. Georgie provided a brief summary of the AER's Retail Performance data for Q2 2024/25 showing increasing energy debt levels and decreasing hardship / payment plan customer numbers in SA – pointing to retailers failing to properly support customers experiencing payment difficulties. A summary of the data was shared with VCAG members.

9. Other Business & Roundtable Discussions

- EWOSA – Decrease in complaints in December 2024 and focus on AEMC rule changes and embedded networks review.
- SAFCA – Energy Roundtable with financial counsellors and retailers to be held in May.
- Alex Fry – one of the Kelvin Trimper scholarship winners. Upgrading an ordinary home for Sustainable Homes Expo on 4 May (only rental). It would provide a good opportunity for a case study for the REPS submission (what included/ what not).
- SI – MCCSA 50 yr anniversary and SAPN sponsoring. Aged care packages and significant changes proposed from 1 July 2025.
- JH – 9 May presenting at the Federal Govt Homelessness and Poverty Frum providing a lived experience perspective.
- JB – Lived Experience Resilience Group and development of outage plan. Council developed newsletter in December and discussed outages and mentioned proposed community forum.

10. Next meeting

Proposed meeting schedule for 2025:

- Thurs 19 June 9.30am - 12.00pm
- Wed 17 Sept 9.30am - 12.00pm
- Wed 25 Nov 9.30am - 12.00pm

Current action Items:

Meeting	Action	Who	Due Date
May '24	Californian tariff and the Oregon Energy Trust initiative examples as case studies.	Cecilia	Nov meeting
March '25	ESCoSA review due 12 April on their productivity review and promotion of REPS. SAPN to finalise feedback on REPS review due at end of March.	Bec/ Cecilia	End March 2025
March '25	Alex to schedule an online meeting for VCAG members to seek feedback on cross-subsidies in the energy sector.	Alex	End March 2025
March '25	A pdf version of the draft content for export tariffs comms to be shared for information to the VCAG.	Alex/ Cecilia	April 2025
March '25	Add the Affordable SA QR code to the SAPN website	Alex	April 2025
March '25	VCAG members to consider if like to participate on Energy Charters End User Customer Group.	All/ Bec	April 2025

Ongoing and procedural action items:

Meeting	Action	Who	Due Date
Nov '23	Life Support Customers review	Bec C	Ongoing